Don't fight your wired future, author urges

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Jim Carroll is seriously wired and he wants you to be, too.

The author of *Surviving the Information Age* and co-author of the *Canadian Internet Handbook* is persuading middle-aged adults that the Internet can dramatically improve their lives.

"There are massive numbers of Canadians who are convinced that what it's about is a place where little boys look at dirty pictures, when they're not trying to break into the Pentagon," Carroll says from his home office in Mississauga, Ont.

"They don't want to go near the Internet because all they hear about are the bad aspects."

Carroll is in Edmonton today to speak at a conference and product showcase organized by office supplies firm Grand & Toy. It's at the Westin Hotel.

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The point he'll make is that adults who aren't familiar with computers and the Internet should embrace the information age and the changes it can bring to their personal lives and careers.

The future is wired, the Internet is here to stay, "so why fight it?" he asks.

The 39-year-old chartered accountant — no Johnny-come-lately, he's been online since 1982 — uses himself as an example of someone who's living better electronically.

The Internet allows him to work from home, giving him more time with his children and less time behind the wheel of a car. His schedule is flexible enough to allow for exercise breaks and visits with the neighbours.

He uses a website to advertise his books, his consulting firm and his public-speaking career. And he's constantly finding new uses for the Internet.

Once, when he was diagnosed with Bell's palsy, a temporary facial paralysis, the Internet "became an extremely powerful tool by which I could interpret what my doctor was telling me." He found an online support group which helped him deal with the emotional side effects. Later he wrote a book on the Internet's impact on health and wellness.

Carroll stresses he's not a "cyber-dweeb loser" staring into his screen all day. And he doesn't get carried away with the potential power of the medium.

"I don't subscribe to the theory that we're all going to become a bunch of chipheads doing everything online. I think we'll keep human contact ... because we'll want it."

Some futurists have suggested that eventually consumers will buy their groceries via the Internet. Carroll says that's crazy.

"If we're going to buy a cut of meat, we're going to want to look at it. We're not going to trust some silly computer system.

"But it's stuff like that that turns a lot of people off technology."